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The stars of Maoriland

A.W. Reed



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LEGENDS OF MAORILAND

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By A. W. REED

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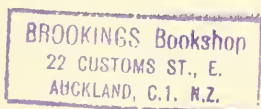
LEGENDS OF MAORILAND.

THE STARS OF MAORILAND

by

A. W. REED.

Illustrated by
P. Newman.



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INTRODUCTION.

Of all the stars that shine upon us on cloudless nights, how many of them are there that we can point to and name? In olden days every Maori would call the stars by their musical Maori names. He watched for their rising and setting, he planted his crops when the stars were favourable, and his canoes on their long ocean voyages were guided by the stars. He loved the beautiful Children of Light.

Unfortunately, we have never been able to learn all the Maori star-lore, and now it is too late, but in this little book you will find a few of the beautiful stories the Maoris tell.

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The Stars of Maoriland.

CHAPTER I.

The Star-Spangled Mantle of Rangi.

When you watch the sky at eventide and see the shadows darken, when the sun is lost behind the western horizon, when the half-light fades and the blue of the sky becomes deeper, and the twinkling stars shine out, one here, one there, until at last the sky is like a gleaming cluster of myriads of diamonds, remember the story they tell in Maoriland of the star-spangled mantle of Rangi.

In the beginning of all things, Rangi the Sky was the husband of Papa the Earth. Rangi and Papa loved each other dearly, and clung tightly to each other while countless years went by. There was neither night nor day, sun nor moon nor stars. No breezes whispered, and no storm winds raged. There were no clouds, and every living thing struggled and crept between earth and sky. Then came Tane, god of the wind-swept spaces of earth and sky, the son of Rangi and Papa, and with his strong arms he threw Rangi far away from Papa.

It was only for love of all the growing things that he threw Rangi so far away from Papa, and when he saw how the tears of Rangi fell as rain, and the mist rose from the earth as Papa sighed, he began his great work of beautifying earth and sky, so that the sundered husband and wife might look at each other and be comforted in their beauty.

We know how Tane spread a green mantle over the wide earth and draped the snow upon her shoulders, so that for all time she is very fair and beautiful.

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Then he climbed the heights to where his father Rangi lay. He was cold and lonely and naked in the great spaces, and Tane wept as he looked on the desolation of his father.

He took the red sun and placed it at the back of Rangi, with the silver moon at the front. Up and down the ten heavens went Tane, till at length he found a wonderful garment of glowing red, which he took with him. He rested seven days after his mighty labours, and then he spread the red cloak over the heaven, from north to south, and east to west, so that Rangi glowed brightly.

But Tane was not satisfied. The garment was not worthy of his father, and he stripped it off again, leaving only a little at the end of heaven, where you may see it at the time of the setting of the sun.

By day Rangi was good to look upon, and Pāpa watched her husband with pride. But at night Rangi was without form until Marama the Moon shone her kindly light upon him.

"Great father," cried Tane, "in the long dark nights, before Marama shines on your breast, all things sorrow. O, my father, I will journey to the end of space, that I may find adornment for you." Somewhere in the silence far above Tane heard an answering sigh.

Tane remembered the Shining Ones who play in the Great Mountain at the very end of all things. He passed swiftly to the end of the world, out into the unknown, where the smiling face of earth could be seen no more; out into the darkness, until he reached Maunga-nui, the Great Mount, where lived the Shining Ones, the children of his brother Uru. Tane greeted his brother, and together they watched the Shining Ones playing on the sands far below at the foot of the mountain.

Uru listened as Tane told him how Rangi and Pāpa had been separated, and how he had come to beg from his brother the Shining Lights to adorn the mantle of the sky. Uru rose to his feet, and shouted so that the sound



"A BLAZE OF LIGHT MARKED THE PASSAGE OF TANE."

of his voice rolled like thunder down the mountain slopes. The Shining Ones heard. They stopped their games and came rolling up the mountain to Uru. As they came nearer, Tane watched them rolling over and over, for every Shining One was shaped like an eye—an eye that twinkled and glowed, lighting up the whole mountain.

When they reached the home of Uru he placed a basket before Tane, and together they plunged their arms into the glowing mass of light and piled the Shining Ones into the basket.

Tane picked up his well-filled basket and strode quickly to his father. Rangi could see him from afar, for a blaze of light marked the passage of Tane. Quickly he fastened the Shining Ones upon his father. Four sacred lights he placed in the four corners of the sky; five glowing lights he arranged in a cross on the breast of Rangi; the tiny Children of Light he fastened on his robe.

The basket Tane hung in the wide heavens, where we can see its soft light—the light which we call the Milky Way. It is this light that shelters the Shining Ones and protects the Children of Light.

When the sun sank to rest, the stars twinkled brightly, and Tane lay on his back and watched his father shake out his robe until the wide heavens were filled with the beauty of Rangi and the glory of the Shining Ones.

CHAPTER II.

The Little Eyes.

The whole world round, in every age, men have turned their eyes to the skies and have seen a group of seven bright shining stars which are called the Pleiades. The Greeks called them the daughters of Atlas and Pleione; the Australian aborigines thought of them as seven sisters; and songs have been sung and tales have been told about these seven beautiful stars in nearly every country.

The Maori people looked up and pointed out these stars to their children and told them that they were the left eyes of seven great chiefs.

Throughout the islands of the southern seas the Pleiades were always welcomed, and when they first appear in the west the new year begins with feasting and dancing and singing of many songs.

This is not a story of Maoriland, but of one of the other jewelled islands of the Pacific.

Once upon a time there was one star which shone so brightly in the sky that other stars dared not go near lest their own beauty should be dimmed in its radiance. Like another moon in the night sky this wonderful star matched the beauty of all the other stars, so that the living things of Mother Earth loved it and nightly waited for its soft radiance to light up the world.

Far up in the hills there was a tiny lake that loved this star. The hot day dragged slowly on, until the star rose in the western sky. Then the little lake shivered a little as it saw the beauty of the star, and all through the night its silvery surface mirrored the star it loved so well, until its waters themselves shone with the beauty of star-light.

One day the little lake was drowsing through the sunny hours of the afternoon when it heard a tiny echo of the distant voice of Tane, the god of light. Tane had brought all the stars long before in the Basket of the Milky Way, and had scattered them over the blue dome of heaven like a sower flinging seed over the land. Tane was jealous of this star that shone so much brighter than the Shining Ones he had given to Rangi, and he planned to destroy it.

All that night the little lake watched the star and longed to tell it of the danger that threatened. When Hine-ata the Morning Maid rose and the sun shone on the lake, it whispered to Rangi the secret it had overheard. Then was mighty Rangi enraged. He was powerless against his great son, but he shone fiercely on

the waters of the lake so that they dissolved in mist and rose up above the earth. The gentle wind carried the mist on its back far above the land until it reached the star, shining in its beauty once more as night had fallen. The misty lake waters rolled round the star it loved so well, and the starlight was dimmed that night as it told of its love, and warned the star of the wrath of Tane.

When Tane and his followers came sweeping down the sky, the star was ready. It fled through the heaven while Rangi tried to protect it. The night went by and Tane gained on the star, until, as morning lit up the eastern sky once more, and the Shining Ones paled before the growing light, the hunted star fled to the east, to the home of Tane, hoping to hide its light in the brightness of the Highway of Tane.

When Tane saw its light growing fainter in the radiance of his own home and the star still beyond his reach, he snatched one of the Shining Ones from Rangi's canopy of night and flung it at the star. There was a mighty crash that resounded through the universe, and the star broke into pieces. Tane scooped them up in his hand and flung them away.

But where Tane threw them so carelessly they still may be found. The Little Eyes men call them—Mata-riki is the Maori name—Little Eyes that men love, that twinkle for ever in the silent heavens.

CHAPTER III.

Little Stories of the Stars.

Maui and the Stars.

Everyone knows about Maui and the tricks he played; how he harnessed the sun; how he went a-fishing and of the great fish he caught; of his tricks with fire, and of the last trick he tried to play on the goddess of death.

Maui had two sons who were as fond of practical jokes as their father was. Now Maui was disappointed when he found what his sons were like. Maui wanted to play his own jokes, and he became jealous of his sons.

One day he called them to him just as the sun had set. "My children," he said, "I am tired of hearing of your misdeeds. You are bringing me into disgrace. I have decided that you must no longer live in this world." The sons looked steadily at their father. He had spoken, and they knew that as his sons they must obey him. Maui was proud when he saw how unflinchingly they faced him.

"You will not be forgotten of men," he said as he placed his hands on their shoulders. "I shall change you into stars. Those who watch for the coming of the night will see you, and you will be welcomed by those who look for the dawn. Farewell, my sons."

Maui touched them so that they changed in form. He took their jawbones, for Maui was a collector of jawbones, which he fashioned into fish-hooks (and that is a story that will some day be told.) Their shining bodies now lit up the ground, so that their very sight was blinding. Maui lifted them up and flung them far into space. They dwindled in size as they soared into the night air, till they found their place in the vast pattern of the sky. One of the sons of Maui is the morning star, and the other is the evening star.

Among the people who had watched Maui throwing his sons into the high heaven was Maui-Taki, his brother. Taki was old and weary, for he had helped Maui, in many of his mighty tasks. He begged Maui to throw him up into the sky, so that he too might live for ever in the sight of the people of this world.

Maui looked at his brother thoughtfully. Truly Taki was beautiful, even in his old age; truly Taki's jaw would make an excellent fish-hook. But Taki's body was cast in the same great mould as Maui's.



"MAUI FLUNG THEM FAR INTO SPACE."

"You are too heavy for me to throw into the sky," he said. "But give me your jawbone and I will show you how to climb, by spells and incantations, the spiders' threads that stretch from earth to sky."

Taki agreed, and with Maui's help he climbed the dizzy heights. His eye gradually became brighter until he reached his place in the sky, where he shone cheerfully for all men to see. He is Takiara, the Guiding Star, and for endless ages he has shone on the children of men.

The Shining Ones who Fall from their Places.

Whanau-marama is the beautiful name the Maoris give to the stars. The name means the Children of Light, but sometimes they are known as *ra ririki*, the little suns. We, who know so much about the great universe in which we live, should remember that many years ago, when our fathers thought the world was flat and the sun moved round the earth, some Maori thinker looked up into the clear night sky and wondered. He saw the twinkling lights that starred the robe of Rangi, shining down through endless space. He felt they were more than the playful children of Uru, and, wiser than he knew, he called them the "little suns."

But the laughing children, the busy mothers and the fierce warrior fathers had no time to think thoughts so deep as these. They could see Tane busily scattering the Children of Light over his father's body. They saw the long softly shining basket that stretches over Rangi's body and guards the little Shining Ones. They saw the children of Light playing together as they did long ago on the sands at the foot of Maunga-nui. The children pushed and scrambled together, and every now and then one of them tumbled out of the folds of Rangi's robe, and fell in a long flash of light across the sky.

When we see a meteor fall towards the earth and burst into flame as it rushes through the heavy air, we say "There is a shooting star." The Maori looks at it, and thinks of the Child of Light who has fallen out of

the robes of the sky as he played with his brothers and sisters.

Shining Lights in the South.

In the far north the sky is sometimes lighted by that strange phenomenon, the *Aurora Borealis*. In the south, when the cold polar light wrinkles and gleams far away, we call it the *Aurora Australis*.

The Maori called it tahu-nui-a-rangi. That seems a long name for it, but it means just this; glowing-big-of-rangi—the great glowing of the sky.

A thousand years ago the daring mariners sailed from their tropic islands and discovered Ao-tea-Roa, and for many years they came and went in their frail ocean-going canoes. Some bold sailors went even further south, down to the land of unending snow and ice. There they stayed, and while the long years have passed, still they are there in that bleak unfriendly land. Sometimes they remember the warmth of their island homes, and they light great fires which shine across the seas and light up all the southern sky.

The Pakeha calls it *Aurora Australis*, but the Maori looks out from his whare and sees that cold glow, and in his musical language he calls it tahu-nui-a-rangi—The Great Glowing of the Sky.

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